

Since its inception in 1965, the Higher Education Act has been focused on enhancing the opportunities of students to pursue postsecondary education. The grant, loan, and work study assistance made available by this Act has made the difference for countless millions in pursuing their dreams for a better life.

In the face of rising college costs, the 1998 amendments have provided students with the lowest cost loans in nearly two decades. With increasing concern about the quality of our nation's teachers, this act will take giant steps in improving teacher preparation. And with students, parents, and—frankly—Senators concerned about the delivery of student aid, this act completely overhauls the federal role by placing it in the hands of a professional and accountable agency within the Department of Education.

I believe the lasting legacy of this reauthorization bill will be its provisions dealing with teachers. At its foundation, it embraces the notion that investing in the preparation of our nation's teachers is a good one. Well prepared teachers play a key role in making it possible for our students to achieve the standards required to assure both their own well being and the ability of our country to compete internationally. In fact, the continued health and strength of our nation depends on our country's ability to improve the education of our young people. Integral to that is the strength and ability of our nation's teaching force. Without a strong, competent, well prepared teaching force, other investments in education will be of little value.

CARL D. PERKINS VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL  
EDUCATION ACT

The story does not end here, as several other important education initiatives are "in the pipeline" on the way to the President. Last week, the House and Senate gave final approval to legislation designed to more fully develop the academic, technical, and vocational skills of secondary and postsecondary students enrolled in vocational and technical education programs in order for the United States to be more competitive in the world economy.

This legislation is an important complement to the Workforce Investment Act and benefitted from the same bipartisan teamwork which produced that Act. The Workforce Investment Act streamlined and consolidated a myriad of job training programs and also put into place tough accountability mechanisms. The 1998 Perkins reauthorization emphasizes the important balance between a strong academic background and a vocational and technical education system that reflects today's global economy.

There are presently between 200,000 and 300,000 unfilled positions in the technology field. The reason for the difficulty in filling these positions is not because of low unemployment

numbers, but because of the lack of skilled workers. These positions require an excellent vocational education system and the ability to pursue further technical education following high school.

#### READING EXCELLENCE ACT

Also in line for signature by the President is the Reading Excellence Act. The purpose of this legislation is to improve both the reading skills of students and the instructional practices for teachers who teach reading, and to expand family literacy programs—including the Even Start program. States and local communities will work together as a partnership in providing professional development activities to teachers and other instructional staff and in carrying out family literacy efforts.

#### HEAD START

Under the leadership of Senator COATS, and with the assistance of Senators DODD and KENNEDY, we will also enact this Congress a reauthorization of the Head Start program. Recognizing the critical role of the pre-school years in a young child's development, this legislation expands the Early Head Start program for our youngest children in a manner which balances the desire to make this program available to more children and families and the need to ensure that every Head Start program meets the high standards of quality that we have demanded.

The new evaluation and research provisions will provide much-needed information about how the program operates, help identify the "best practices," and will guide the grantees, the Department of Health and Human Services, and Congress to continue the improvements in Head Start which began four years ago.

#### CHARTER SCHOOLS

Finally, the President will soon be presented with the Charter School Expansion Act of 1998. Senators COATS and LIEBERMAN are to be particularly commended for their skill and persistence in forging a bipartisan alliance on behalf of this legislation. The purpose of this legislation is to provide financial assistance for the planning, design, and initial implementation of new charter schools. This assistance will enhance the efforts of states and local communities to increase the number of charter schools and will help meet the President's goal of having 3,000 charter schools by the year 2000.

In terms of education, I believe that the 105th Congress is among the most productive in my memory. The actions we have taken this Congress touch the lives of students of all ages—from youngsters in Head Start and Even Start, to special education students, to high school vocational students, to college undergraduates and graduate students, to adults in need of remedial education.

It is unfortunate that all of this work seems to have been forgotten. It is also unfortunate that no one is acknowledg-

ing that congressional Republicans stand ready to spend as much money on education as we have offsets to support.

Instead, an effort appears to be underway to convince the American public that failing to fund an untested and unauthorized program to reduce class size should be taken as a sign of total neglect of education by this Congress. The facts just don't support that conclusion. The number of teachers is not as important as the quality of teachers. On the Federal level we must focus on promoting and ensuring quality. We don't necessarily need millions of new teachers—what we really need are millions of good teachers.

To hear the President and his advisers, hiring more teachers and reducing classroom size is the silver bullet which will solve the many deficiencies now plaguing our elementary and secondary schools. What we should all know by now is that there are no silver bullets when it comes to assuring the quality of education.

Rather, the only way to achieve the goals we seek is through the constant, day-to-day plugging away on behalf of the highest possible standards in all our education endeavors. I believe that the Congress is doing its part and that we have the legislative record to back that up.

#### RECOGNIZING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE CITIES OF BRISTOL, TENNESSEE AND BRISTOL, VIRGINIA

Mr. JEFFORDS. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H. Con. Res. 214, which is at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (H. Con. Res. 214) recognizing the contributions of the cities of Bristol, Tennessee, and Bristol, Virginia, and their people to the origins and development of Country Music, and for other purposes.

The Senate proceeded to consider the concurrent resolution.

Mr. JEFFORDS. I ask unanimous consent the concurrent resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and any statements relating thereto be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 214), with its preamble, was agreed to.

#### COAST GUARD AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEARS 1998 AND 1999

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate now proceed to consideration of Calendar No. 466, S. 1259.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows: